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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 008071

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/PPD

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: NATO Tour for Young French Political Leaders -
October 13-14, 2005

1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: The future shape of NATO as well as its ability to ensure collective security and co-exist with an independent European defense have been the subject of discussions in French political and media circles for some time. At an illustrative debate at the French Senate last year, two members of the French Foreign Affairs, Defense and Armed Forces Committee were particularly critical of NATO. Former Senator and member of the Commission, Jean-Yves Autexier, stated that "NATO is not a security alliance, but a tool for global American strategy in this it is an obstacle for European Defense." Helene Luc, Vice-president of the Committee said: "We should look at things honestly. NATO represents the American dominance of European defense." Their comments represent an example of one French mindset.

2. Given these types of French apprehensions, the Mission takes full advantage of NATO tours for select participants to broaden their knowledge of defense issues. The Public Affairs Section recently arranged for a NATO tour for emerging political leaders, both left and right of center, and their tour highlighted NATO and European defense as compatible, not antithetical. The day at the Joint Force Command headquarters brought home that NATO is first and foremost a military alliance as opposed to a political organization. The French participants, mostly staff aides on Foreign Affairs and Defense Committees at the French Senate and National Assembly selected by Embassy Paris, praised the tour for deepening their understanding of NATO, the role of the Joint Force Command, and the importance of collective defense to meet the challenges of the 21st century. End Introduction and Summary.

DAY ONE

3. NATO headquarters: USNATO's Deputy Chief of Mission, John Koenig, began the day of briefings with an overview of both the U.S.'s role in NATO and France's contributions to the Alliance. He stressed that France and the United States share the same vision for the strategic development of NATO, but that where Iraq is concerned, the U.S. would like to see greater French participation in the Training Mission in ar-Rustamiyah. The DCM detailed U.S. involvement in various peacekeeping missions, including Afghanistan and the Sudan. He outlined how NATO coordinates humanitarian efforts and gave the example of the strategic air bridge to Pakistan that assisted the victims of the devastating earthquake earlier that month.

4. The French Ambassador to NATO, Richard Duque, accompanied by his deputy welcomed the group to the French Mission to NATO. Ambassador Duque began the briefing with a history of France's involvement in NATO and the withdrawal from NATO's integrated military structure in 1966. He underscored that the fact that France does not belong to the integrated military structure is no longer an issue for France or for its allies, and in no way hinders France's ability to fully cooperate in NATO operations. The Ambassador described NATO as an "instrument of stabilization" and touched on NATO transformation, a term he said he finds "mysterious," but recognizes that it is in the interest of France to promote greater interoperability. Ambassador Duque touched on the "ambiguous attitude" of the U.S. with regard to the EU, saying that the U.S. wants a strong Europe, but only within the Alliance. NATO, he added, allows the U.S. to have a presence in Europe and an independent European defense would undermine this. The newest members to NATO are, according to Ambassador Duque, adverse to an independent European defense because they are intent on maintaining their strategic alliance with the U.S. and are generally wary of the EU. Finally, he suggested that the U.S. is not as present as it once was in NATO because today it is looking for more flexibility with the various ad hoc coalitions it has established in Afghanistan or Iraq for example.

5. The Counselor for the Portuguese Delegation to NATO, Andre Melo Bandeira, gave a briefing in French on the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperative Initiative that was very well received. Mr. Bandeira discussed the Broader Middle East Initiative emphasizing

the difficulty in determining the boundaries of the Broader Middle East. He also spoke about Turkey's membership bid to the EU and again of the difficulty in defining the political and geographical boundaries of Europe. This briefing was followed by a discussion on NATO in Afghanistan and the challenges facing NATO in that region. This discussion was led by Colonel Andrew Budd of the Strategic Policy and Concepts Branch of the NATO International Military Committee. In a frank presentation of the situation in Afghanistan, Colonel Budd regretted a lack of planning ahead on the part of NATO and SHAPE in Afghanistan. He said that this lack of vision is responsible for the problems that ISAF has experienced since 2004 and added that the massive sending of troops to the region was not the right solution. The fact that NATO commits to operations such as the ISAF mission in Afghanistan without sufficient attention to the "end state" is NATO's principal weakness, said Colonel Budd. He described the logistical problems that slow down both the reconstruction of the country as well as its stabilization. He explained the purpose of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) that are made up of military and civilian personnel and sent to remote regions to extend the authority of the Afghan central government, promote and enhance security, and facilitate humanitarian relief and reconstruction operations. He warned, however, of the dangers that the PRTs face, being isolated and at the mercy of local warlords.

16. The working lunch was an occasion to discuss NATO-EU relations. Overall, briefers and guests agreed that France and the U.S. are more aligned than separate and that NATO and the EU generally speak with one voice. The briefing after lunch continued the discussion on NATO and the EU with a debate on the adaptability of the Berlin Plus agreement and whether or not Berlin Plus is the best way for the EU and NATO to work together. The example of Darfur was put forth as an instance where Berlin Plus does not work. The discussion also focused on the efforts that remain to be made toward greater interoperability between the NATO Response Force and the EU Battle Groups. The final briefing in French, by the Deputy Public Affairs Officer for USNATO, provided the group with a chance to recap the information that they had gathered over the course of the day and ask some final policy-related questions.

DAY TWO

17. Brunssum - Joint Force Command Headquarters: The Press and Information Officer gave an extremely well-presented and informative presentation of JFC and its place within NATO's military structure. The group came away from this briefing with a broader view of JFC's organization, its mission range and its operational priorities. The briefer gave an overview of JFC's command of the NATO Response and ISAF operations in Afghanistan. The preparations for the upcoming exercise in Cape Verde, "Steadfast Jaguar," were outlined and the JFC Press Officer highlighted the extent of the challenges that face NATO because of the need to be operational quickly in any part of the world. Part of the briefing was devoted to NATO Transformation and what this means for the future of the Alliance. The participants' questions focused, for the most part, on Afghanistan and consequences on the ground of combining the commands of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) peacekeeping operation with the U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom. France has been outwardly opposed to combining these two operations and the group reflected this position. The briefer stressed the danger of confusing peacekeeping and the war on terror. At the end of the day the group was unanimously enthusiastic about the day in Brunssum noting, however, that this briefing, which dealt with the operational and technical details of NATO missions ideally should have come before the day-long briefings at NATO headquarters that focused on policy and the decision-making aspect of NATO.

18. CONCLUSION: The participants were extremely impressed by the quality of the briefings as well as by the briefers. Discussions in the train returning to Paris focused on the tour's usefulness in dispelling a common notion in France that NATO is an ageing institution that has become quasi-obsolete since the end of the Cold War. Instead, participants came away with a sense of NATO's adaptability, both in its peace-keeping and peace enforcement operations, and its new function in the war on terrorism. End
Conclusion
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